

DIIME DRUG INDUSTRY IMMUNITY MUST END

RxVICTIMS.COM coalition convened by Michigan Citizen Action

LESLEE WILTJER

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TORT REFORM June 20, 2006

- Thank you to the Committee and to Chairman Elsenheimer for the opportunity to speak with you today.
- The time is long overdue for the legislature to deal with the issue of drug industry immunity – and to put the dangerous law that creates it behind us forever.
- Like others testifying before you today, I am a member of a citizens' coalition we call DIIME, which stands for Drug Industry Immunity Must End.
- Our coalition is comprised of people whose lives have been forever changed by prescription drugs we were told were safe.
- We trusted the Food and Drug Administration to keep us safe.
- Instead, drugs like Vioxx, Rezulin and the drug combination fen-phen left us with life-altering disabilities, crippling medical bills, a reduced quality of life, and, in too many cases, the loss of our loved ones.
- But because we live in Michigan, we are barred by our own state's government from holding accountable companies that made billions selling harmful drugs to people like us.
- This is true even when it has been shown, thanks to court cases outside of Michigan, that a drug company engaged in systematic deception and coverups to hide the dangers of their drugs from doctors and patients.
- That's because of the 1996 law granting the drug industry immunity when its products cause harm or kill.
- We are the only state in the country to let the drug industry off the hook – to hold the drug industry unaccountable to our state's own citizens.
- Since our coalition began calling for a repeal of drug industry immunity, we have seen incredible resistance put up by the pharmaceuticals lobby.

MICHIGAN CITIZEN ACTION

729 Academy St.
Kalamazoo, MI 49007
269-349-9170

220 Bagley St., Suite 948
Detroit, MI
313-963-4260

336 W. First St. Suite 103
Flint, MI 48502

- We have seen legislators supportive of repeal attacked in the media, on billboards, and in mailings sent to their constituents.
- We have also seen members flooded with an unending stream of disinformation, most of it meant to convince you that there is really no such thing as drug industry immunity in Michigan.
- Though they cannot point to one example, the drugs lobby and its friends would have members believe that drug companies *do* face accountability in Michigan.
- Incredibly, they would have you place all your trust for protecting Michigan citizens in the hands of the *FDA* – the very organization that has failed the American people so dramatically, so many times.
- Chairman, the members of the DIIME coalition come before this committee today not as legal experts or political experts.

We come before you, instead, as citizens – citizens with real, personal knowledge that we cannot rely on the FDA alone to protect the people of Michigan.

What will protect consumers better is a return to *real* accountability.

And that's what DIIME is calling for:

- Not any special treatment for Michigan residents;
- Not any special treatment, favorable or otherwise, for the giant drug companies;
- In fact, nothing special at all: just simple, old-fashioned accountability.
- Once signed into law, House Bill 5527 will move us in that direction. Therefore, I urge you to support it... not just with words, but by actively joining us in asking for an up-or-down vote this month. While it may be tempting to kick this issue around and hope it just goes away, I can tell you with certainty that it will not – Not until legislation that does repeal drug industry immunity is finally passed. We, the members of DIIME, feel a solemn responsibility to see this fight through – in memory of those who have been lost to dangerous drugs, and for the sake of all the people of Michigan -- and we will.
- Again, I thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Submitted by:

Leslee Wiltjer
02650 Behling Road
Boyne City, MI 49712